

TOWARD INDEPENDENCE:

**The Emergence of the U.S. Air Force
1945-1947**

Herman S. Wolk

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Toward Independence

From the Wright Brothers' first flight, a long, convoluted road led to the creation of the modern independent United States Air Force. Despite frustrating bureaucratic delays and political maneuvering, the ultimate goal was clear. Two world wars had devastated whole continents and threatened long-term global peace. Only a well-prepared American military establishment, fully utilizing its Air Force, could provide a strong national defense and help ensure world peace. As aerospace technology took off, an independent Air Force would lead the way into the atomic age, and a new military structure would be required. Just as important as technology, however, would be the vision and energy of air power advocates. Over five decades, Air Force people would build the world's finest air organization by following a simple creed: putting service above self.

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14. ABSTRACT <p>This booklet describes the political, military, and technological context during 1945-1947 that led to the establishment of the independent United States Air Force. The author emphasizes the interaction of service disputes with Congress. Holding center stage in this fast-paced narrative are Symington, Truman, Forrestal, Norstad, Sherman, Arnold, Spaatz, and other key players in the struggle for air independence.</p> <p>38 pp., diagrams, photos, suggested readings</p> <p>GPO Stock No.008-070-00708-8 ISBN: 0-16-061366-3</p>					
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Early Advocates for an Independent Air Arm

Nearly a century ago, U.S. Army aviators began experimenting with balloons and airships and eagerly anticipated the military use of the new "heavier-than-air" flying machines developed by the Wright brothers. As new technologies and capabilities emerged, a new organization would be needed to exploit aviation's military potential. In August 1907 the U.S. Army Signal Corps took the first step, forming an Aeronautical Division under Capt. Charles deF. Chandler to take "charge of all matters pertaining to military ballooning, air machines and all kindred subjects." Some early visionaries foresaw that the airplane would revolutionize warfare, and they became advocates of a more prominent, more independent air arm. It would take forty years for this dream to come true. The intervening decades would see air power advocates wage legislative battles to give the Army's air arm status equal to that of the other Army branches—and eventually to create an independent United States Air Force.

World War I demonstrated the usefulness of the air element in various roles—observing troop movements, supporting ground action, and even strategic bombing. To military aviators, the strategic role seemed a harbinger of air power's future. The trench warfare of World War I had proven costly and self-defeating; aerial bombing behind the lines, the theory went, could destroy the enemy's supply network and break his will to fight. One out-spoken airman, Brig. Gen. William [Billy] Mitchell, argued that the airplane was more economical and militarily effective than the battleship and that an independent air service was the best way to exploit aircraft, especially for strategic missions and coastal defense. Mitchell seemed to prove his point in 1921 when bomber planes under his command destroyed obsolete warships off the Virginia Capes including the battleship *Ostfriesland*, thought to be unsinkable.

Despite this evidence, the War Department continued to believe that the Air Service's main role was the support of ground troops, and thus it should remain subordinate to Army ground commanders. The wartime Army Chief of Staff, General Peyton C. March, expressed the predominant War Department view: "The war had taught many lessons; the principles of warfare, however, remained unchanged. It was not won, as some had predicted it would be, by some new terrible development of modern science; it was won, as has every other war in history, by men, munitions and morale." Textbooks at Army schools still described the airplane's primary role as being observation. Between 1916 and 1920, eight different bills to establish a separate Department of Aeronautics were introduced in Congress. The resulting law, the Reorganization Act of 1920, recog-

nized the Air Service only as a combatant branch of the Army. For the time being, the Navy remained the nation's first line of defense.

Eventually, another key piece of legislation—the Air Corps Act of 1926—elevated the air arm's status within the Army, but it failed to satisfy the air advocates. The Act sanctioned Air Corps representation on the War Department General Staff and created the Office of Assistant Secretary of War for Air, first held by F. Trubee Davison. Yet there was still little appreciation of the idea of an independent air mission. The Air Corps remained subject to the control of the War Department, which considered support of ground troops as aviation's major function. Meanwhile, the aviation community quietly developed a concept of air power that looked to the future. "We were just sort of voices in the wilderness," General Ira C. Eaker recalled. "A great many military people considered us crackpots." At the air arm's premier service school, the Air Service Field Officers School (subsequently, the Air Corps Tactical School) at Langley Field, Virginia, instructors espoused an air doctrine based upon independent air operations. In future wars, they maintained, American attack planes and bombers would cripple the enemy's air force and strike the "vital centers" of the national economy.

Gaining Control over Air Operations

Throughout the 1920s, several boards considered the question of the organization of military aviation. Maj. Gen. Mason M. Patrick, Chief of the Air Service, favored air autonomy within the structure of the War Department. He opposed permanent assignment of air units to the ground forces. The Lassiter Board report of 1923, which recommended the establishment of a General Headquarters [GHQ] Air Force, marked the Army's first acknowledgement that the independent air mission might serve an important role. Two years later, the Morrow Board, appointed by President Calvin Coolidge, opposed the creation of a separate Department of Aeronautics. The Board's report of November 1925 emphasized that:

No airplane capable of making a transoceanic flight to our country with a useful military load and of returning to safety is now in existence. . . .with the advance in the art. . . .it does not appear that there is any ground for anticipation of such development to a point which would constitute a direct menace to the United States in any future which scientific thought can now foresee.

In December 1925 yet another group, the Lampert Committee, recommended that a Department of National Defense be established under a civilian secretary. This finding implied the creation of three coequal services and foreshadowed the modern Department of Defense. Unfortunately, neither the War Department nor the Congress took action. Then, in the 1930s a breakthrough occurred. Both the Drum Board and the Baker Board proposed formation of a centralized General Headquarters Air Force to control air units. Based on the Baker Board report, the GHQ Air Force was established on March 1, 1935, with Brig. Gen. Frank M. Andrews as commanding general. A renowned air commander, Andrews had served as commandant of the Advanced Flying School and Chief of the Training and Operations Division in the Office of the Chief of the Air Corps, as well as with the Operations and Training Division of the War Department General Staff.

Before the creation of the GHQ Air Force, Air Corps units in the United States had been under operational control of the Army Corps area commanders in whose territory they were stationed. There were nine such corps areas, each commanded by a ground officer. In similar fashion to the Chief of Infantry and the other Chiefs of Arms or Services, the Chief of the Air Corps had been responsible for support of his units—the design and procurement of aircraft, personnel, training, and doctrine. The Air Corps Chief therefore, was not really an operational commander. But with creation of the GHQ Air Force, General Andrews gained *operational* control of tactical units, formed into three wings. Brig. Gen. Henry H. Arnold headed the 1st Wing at March Field, California; Col. Henry Conger Pratt commanded the 2nd Wing at Langley Field, Virginia; and Lt. Col. Gerald C. Brant led the 3rd Wing at Barksdale Field, Louisiana. The Chief of the Air Corps and the GHQ Commander were on the same echelon of command, and each reported separately to the War Department. Thus, the Office of the Chief of the Air Corps controlled funds, personnel, and procurement of equipment, while GHQ Air Force was responsible for combat efficiency and results, without the authority over the resources needed to accomplish its mission. Administratively, tactical bases came under the Army corps area commanders. When handling air matters, the Army Chief of Staff and the War Department General Staff dealt with all three echelons: the commander of GHQ Air Force, the Chief of the Air Corps, and the corps area commanders. This type of organization severely divided authority between the Office of the Chief of Air Corps and GHQ Air Force.

Organizing for World War II

In response to Nazi aggression in the late 1930s, President Roosevelt called for a massive buildup of American air power. "Military aviation," Roosevelt observed, "is increasing at an unprecedented and alarming rate." General Henry H. Arnold, Chief of the Air Corps, was anxious to move to counter the threat from the air. Arnold and Robert A. Lovett, Assistant Secretary of War for Air since April 1941, agreed with General George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff, that the question of air independence should be put on hold while war clouds intensified over Europe and the air buildup proceeded.

Mobilization for war led to the establishment of the Army Air Forces (AAF) on June 20, 1941, by revision of Army Regulation 95-5. This consolidation of the air mission marked the first major step toward air autonomy since establishment of the GHQ Air Force, and according to the official Army history, "constituted the most radical change in War Department organization before World War II." General Arnold became Chief, Army Air Forces (he had previously been designated Deputy Chief of Staff for Air) and would coordinate the Office, Chief of Air Corps and the Air Force Combat Command, a redesignated GHQ controlling four continental air forces and their subordinate bomber and interceptor forces. Also critical to success, Arnold formed his own Air Staff as part of AAF Headquarters. The formation of the AAF within the War Department was designed to create an autonomous entity similar to the Marine Corps within the Navy Department.

New command arrangements also pointed to greater recognition and an increasing role for the Army's air arm. In July 1941, General Arnold and the Chief of the Navy Bureau of Aeronautics became members of the Joint Army-Navy Board, a kind of national military high command. And in August, Arnold participated in the Atlantic Conference meeting between President Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. The British air, ground, and naval chiefs accompanied Churchill, so that Arnold in effect took his place at this conference table as a member of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. "I tried to give Arnold all the power I could," emphasized Marshall, "and tried to make him as nearly as I could Chief of Staff of the Air."

In October 1941, Arnold asked his confidant, Brig. Gen. Carl A. Spaatz, Chief of the Air Staff, to craft a reorganization plan which would formally recognize the AAF as an autonomous entity coequal with the Army's ground and service forces. The War Department rejected Spaatz's plan, but Arnold in November proposed to the War Department a similar reorganization, stressing the need for unity of command:



President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered a massive buildup of air forces in response to Nazi aggression in Europe.

The development of the Air Force as a new and coordinated member of the combat team has introduced new methods of waging war. Although the basic Principles of War remain unchanged, the introduction of these new methods has altered the application of those Principles of War to modern combat. In the past, the military commander has been concerned with the employment of a single decisive arm, which was supported by auxiliary arms and services. . . . Today the military commander has two striking arms. These two arms are capable of operating together at a single time and place, on the battlefield. But they are also capable of operating singly at places remote from each other. The great range of the air arm makes it possible to strike far from the battlefield, and attack the sources of enemy military power. The mobility of the air force makes it possible to swing the mass of that striking power from those distant objectives to any selected portion of the battlefield in a matter of hours, even though the bases of the air force may be widely separated.

The War Plans Division of the War Department General Staff approved Arnold's plan, but before it could be fully coordinated and

implemented, the Japanese attacked the U.S. Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor and the United States immediately entered the war.

Three War-Fighting Forces

The movement toward air independence regained its momentum in January 1942, when General Marshall appointed Maj. Gen. Joseph T. McNarney to head a War Department Reorganization Committee, with the objective of decentralizing the responsibilities of the War Department Staff while granting the air arm increased autonomy. The result was the so-called "Marshall reorganization" of March 1942, by which the Army Air Forces became coequal with the Army Ground Forces and the Services of Supply [subsequently the Army Service Forces]—essentially the structure that had been proposed by Spaatz and Arnold. This reorganization, under War Department Circular 59, stipulated the AAF's mission was "to procure and maintain equipment peculiar to the Army Air Forces, and to provide Air Force units properly organized, trained and equipped for combat operations. Procurement and related functions will be executed under the direction of the Under Secretary of War."

After March 1942, the Air Corps—which had been established by law—remained the primary component of the AAF, but the Office Chief of the Air Corps and the Air Force Combat Command were abolished, their functions becoming part of AAF Headquarters. Officers would continue to be commissioned in the Air Corps. The Army Air Forces had thus gained a position of significant autonomy within the War Department, a move that Maj. Gen. Otto L. Nelson, Jr., of the War Department General Staff, called "the most drastic and fundamental change which the War Department had experienced since the establishment of the General Staff by Elihu Root in 1903." However, the air arm's near-autonomy could be short lived: the reorganization was due to expire six months after the end of the war, in accordance with the First War Powers Act of December 18, 1941.

During World War II, because of its quasi-autonomous position within the War Department, the Army Air Forces held representation on all Joint Chiefs of Staff committees in Washington. This flowed from General Arnold's presence on both the councils of the Joint Chiefs and the Anglo-American Combined Chiefs of Staff. Thus, Arnold and the Air Staff put forward their views in high-level strategic planning sessions. According to the official Army history: "It was clearly in the interests of the common military effort, as it was clearly the intent of General Marshall, to preserve the system whereby the Army Air Forces exercised great influence in determining the way in which U.S. Army air units were employed." The AAF's repre-



Gen. Henry H. (Hap) Arnold and Gen. George C. Marshall at the Allies' Cairo Conference in 1943. Arnold's participation in high-level meetings increased the AAF's stature within the War Department.

sentation in the highest joint planning and strategy councils amounted to an acceptance of the Army air element as a military service virtually equal to the Army and Navy. For example, in the Joint Plans Committee, AAF representatives were assigned directly by Arnold or the Air Staff, rather than being assigned from the Operations Division of the War Department. As Arnold noted in June 1943: "The AAF are being directly controlled by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Combined Chiefs of Staff more and more each day. Consequently, AAF representation in the joint and combined planning staffs has become a position of paramount importance to me."

The independent character of AAF planning and staff activities in wartime extended to strategic operations worldwide. Arnold had long advocated conducting "independent" strategic bombing operations, exempt from the control of theater commanders. In Europe this concept led to the establishment of the U.S. Strategic Air Forces in Europe. Centralized control of air forces by airmen became a reality in April 1944, with the creation of the Twentieth Air Force, a strategic bombing force directly under Arnold's command as executive agent of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Twentieth's all-important mis-

sion was to take the war to the Japanese by conducting a B-29 long-range bombing campaign against the home islands. This arrangement, in effect, gave the AAF equality with the ground and naval forces in the Pacific. Arnold was authorized by the JCS "to implement and execute major decisions of the Joint Chiefs of Staff relative to deployment and missions, including objectives, of the Twentieth Air Force."

Planning for the Postwar Military

Throughout the long years of World War II, the issue of the organization of military services in postwar America—and the place of the Army air arm within this structure—remained ever-present. War-time organization in the theaters of operations, the evolving relationships between the military high commands, and the drive for unity of command gave considerable impetus to the need to determine a workable postwar structure. Also, as noted, the War Department's wartime organization, under the First War Powers Act, would expire six months after the end of the war.

Even as the Western allies prepared for Operation Overlord, the massive cross-channel invasion of the European continent, the Congress in April 1944 again considered the question of how best to structure the nation's postwar military forces. The Woodrum Committee focused on the importance of the principle of unity of command. "In one form or another we have acquired a degree of unity of command in all the theaters of war," Brig. Gen. Haywood S. Hansell, Jr., emphasized to the committee. But, he noted that "the achievement of that unity on the field of battle has been reached with great difficulty." Assistant Secretary of War for Air Robert Lovett observed that the allocation and disposition of forces must be determined by a unified staff, "and not on the tortured interpretation of antiquated documents dealing with vague theories and doctrines which have to be thrown away the moment war breaks out." A separate Air Force should be created in the postwar period, Lovett said, but the Navy should maintain its fleet air arm.

Reluctant to commit to the creation of a single department of national defense, naval leaders told the Woodrum Committee that the postwar options needed further study. The importance of the fleet air arm remained central to the Navy's position. Eventually, the committee recommended a careful examination of the views of theater military commanders. For his part, Under Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson expressed the opinion that everyone should get on with the business of winning the war.

Key War Department officials addressed the Woodrum Committee. Assistant Secretary of War for Air, Robert A. Lovett (*right*) and Brig. Gen. Haywood S. Hansell, Jr., Twentieth Air Force Chief of Staff, (*below*) testified that future wars would require unified command on the field of battle.



The Joint Chiefs, however, saw no reason for delay. They wanted a postwar plan ready when the war ended, so in May 1944 they appointed a JCS Special Committee for Reorganization of National Defense to gather the opinions of commanders in the theaters and in Washington. After a ten-month study, the committee's report of April 1945 was signed by Maj. Gens. William F. Tompkins (War Department General Staff) and Harold L. George (AAF); Rear Adm. Malcolm F. Schoeffel (USN); and Col F. Trubee Davison (AAF). The document also included a dissenting opinion by the committee chairman and senior naval member, Adm. James O. Richardson. In short, the committee recommended establishment of an independent United States Air Force coequal with the Army and Navy. Except for Richardson, the members of the committee proposed a Department of National Defense, headed by a civilian secretary.

Based on wartime experience (particularly problems in joint operations), the committee endorsed unified command in Washington and in future theaters of war. National security in the postwar era would require integration of land, sea, and air operations. Committee members warned that once the war ended, if "the armed forces were still operating under the present system, with no wartime compulsion to get together, even the existing degree of cooperation can be expected to disappear. This situation will be aggravated by the forced readjustment to peacetime conditions." As General Marshall often noted, with a tight budget in the postwar period, service parochialism would increase.

Having studied current wartime operations, the JCS committee found that American forces were not fully integrating land, sea, and air operations. Under these conditions, parochialism tended to increase. Each Army and Navy component within a specific theater belonged and owed allegiance to a separate department. Hence, the theater commander could not carry out his command decisions as efficiently as he wanted. Significant additional progress was impossible under the existing system. A single Department of Defense at the outset of war would have fostered much better coordination and teamwork between the services. Also, the present system would not work nearly as well in peacetime as in war.

The Navy's Opposition

Admiral Richardson, the senior Navy member of the committee, filed a minority report opposing the recommendation for a single Department of National Defense. He argued that the plan was "theoretically better than any yet proposed, but from a practical point of view it is unacceptable." Richardson favored the status quo, arguing that

the lessons of war were not yet clear. After the war the military would face the monumental task of demobilization, and for this reason it would also be inappropriate to reorganize prematurely.

Richardson contended that the effectiveness of combat forces in the field bore no direct relation to the existence of a single department in Washington. Nor did he support the proposals for a Secretary of the Armed Forces and a Commander of the Armed Forces. He was wary of such powerful positions, fearful of their adversely affecting the Navy. Richardson likewise found himself in opposition to an Air Force coequal with the Army and Navy. He freely admitted that his chief concern was that the Navy would lose its air arm to the Air Force.

Though against the creation of a single department, Admiral Richardson advocated that the organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (along with wartime organizational changes by the War and Navy Departments) be perpetuated by statute. A joint secretariat should be set up, and the subject of reorganization given further study. This reflected the Navy's view that for coordination the services should rely on the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the various JCS committees. Other members of the special committee disagreed with the Navy, observing that matters referred to the Joint Chiefs or to a joint secretariat would then be sent to subcommittees and to groups within the separate departments. The committee doubted that efficiency could be attained by this kind of group action. Also, it had weighed and discarded the idea of having the Chairman, JCS, act as the Chief of Staff to the President, to decide controversial issues. Under this system, the committee felt that the Chief of Staff to the President would have authority to decide matters but not be charged with their execution. Furthermore, the Chief of Staff would not have to report to the Secretary of National Defense, thus infringing upon the responsibilities and powers of the service secretaries.

Senior naval leaders—Admiral Leahy, Chief of Staff to the President; Adm. Ernest J. King, Chief of Naval Operations; and Adm. Chester W. Nimitz, Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet—considered the committee's recommendations radical. They resisted the concept of a "super-secretary," claiming that one man could not effectively administer both the Army and Navy. Neither economy nor enhanced efficiency would accrue under a single department system. Besides, in their view the Navy's power and influence would suffer under such a reorganization. They recalled that in 1918 Britain's Royal Naval Air Service had been fused into the Royal Air Force. The reorganization advocated by the special committee would subject the Navy's requirements to review by officials who had no responsibility for initiating them. Ultimately, sea power would be weakened by people who did not understand its potential.

Making the Case for Air Force Independence

The airmen's struggle to develop air power's full potential had begun in the era of the Wright brothers and over the decades had centered on the drive for air autonomy within the Army, and finally, separation. Although the AAF leaders had put the drive for air independence on hold during the war, the conflict itself, as they saw it, made the case for separation. All forms of air power—tactical, strategic, airlift, reconnaissance—demonstrated in totality the need for a separate service which could draw up its own requirements and present its own budget to the Congress.

During the war General Arnold prepared well for peacetime by forming postwar planning groups within AAF headquarters. The over-riding objective was the creation of an independent Air Force which, Arnold believed, would form the linchpin of America's post-war national security organization. Given that the nation had never adequately been prepared for war, Arnold made the case to Congress for separate "fundamental" air power as part of a revolutionary American military policy—that the United States required a peacetime military establishment designed and structured *to deter war*. "Each new crisis in our history," Arnold noted, "has found our armed

The Army and Navy took opposing sides on the issue of creating a single Department of Defense. Adm. Ernest J. King (*left*) believed that unifying the Army, Navy, and Air Force would breed friction among the services. Gen. George C. Marshall (*right*), however, argued that unification would be necessary for comprehensive planning in peacetime.



services far from effectively, efficiently, or economically organized. With each crisis, modernization and coordination have been hammered out under war pressure at great waste of resources, to be allowed in large measure to lapse when the crisis is over."

Arnold believed that the war had ushered in a new era that would be dominated by air power, both conventional and atomic. Japan had been forced to surrender without invasion after atomic bombs had been dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The use of atomic weapons, the AAF Chief believed, had given the Emperor "a way out," after the B-29 conventional bombing offensive had destroyed Japan's ability to make offensive war. The objective of the B-29 campaign had been to knock the Japanese out of the war without having to resort to an invasion. Thus, the most important lesson for America in peacetime was that "our security can in the future be threatened suddenly and with terrific destructive power." The new peacetime military establishment must be geared to deter conflict by maintaining adequate forces in-being.

America's armed forces need to be coordinated under unified command—a theme also struck by General Eisenhower—with the Air Force as a coequal service to the Army and Navy. Arnold went out of his way to reassure Congress that *not all* forms of air power needed to be concentrated in a single arm. Air power should continue to be an "auxiliary" of land and sea power. The development and employment of "fundamental" air power however, must be carried out by a service having this as its primary responsibility. Arnold defined "fundamental" air power as land-based strategic and tactical air forces. At the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, there was no independent Air Force. However, under the enormous pressure of global war, Arnold noted, Secretary of War Stimson and Army Chief of Staff, General George Marshall, had the foresight to give the Army Air Forces coordinate status with the ground forces through the March 1942 reorganization. This made possible advanced strategic planning. Only with coequal status with the ground and naval forces "could the air commander authoritatively present before the Supreme Commander what he could accomplish, assume the responsibility for its accomplishment, and be free to carry out that responsibility with full appreciation of air capabilities and limitations."

During the war a large degree of coordination had been achieved through the Joint Chiefs and the board and committee system, but there remained important matters which could not be resolved. Thus General Arnold, stressing unity of command, advocated a single defense department headed by a civilian Secretary, with a military Chief of Staff to the Secretary, and three coequal military departments:

... the security of this country and the maintenance of world peace demand that our military establishment include a co-equal component devoted exclusively to the problems of the air—to their exploration and their solution—to assurance of control of the air over our country and, if necessary, over that of an aggressor.

Eisenhower and Truman Lend Support

As General Arnold and the AAF staff made their case for an independent air arm, other key leaders stood up in support. Foremost were General Dwight D. Eisenhower and President Harry Truman. Both the President and the wartime Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe had learned an important lesson from the disaster at Pearl Harbor and the experience on both fronts—that unified command (component commanders in the theaters of war working under a supreme commander) was absolutely essential for an effective and efficient postwar military establishment. Both leaders also strongly advocated a separate Air Force.

Eisenhower had led the massive allied forces to victory in Europe, capped by the stunningly successful invasion of the Continent. Having commanded the greatest unified force in history, he spoke from the crucible of hard experience. Eisenhower's road had not always been easy, marked by conflicting strategies and contentious personalities, but he came to the unalterable conclusion that the nation required an Air Force coequal to the land and sea forces and capable of integrated air-ground operations. Beyond this, Eisenhower was a political-military statesman of the highest order. He realized that the military would be cut down to size after the war ("We should be good-natured about it," he told his staff.) and he believed that efficiency and economy would best be served by a unified defense establishment.

When General Eisenhower testified in November 1945 before the Senate Military Affairs Committee he emphasized unity of command, the importance of air power to victory, and the necessity of creating a United States Air Force in the postwar world. Pointing to the success of the cross-channel attack, Eisenhower made clear that:

The Normandy Invasion was based on a deep-seated faith in the power of the Air Forces in overwhelming number to intervene in the land battle, i.e., that the Air Forces by their action could have the effect on the ground of making it possible for a small force of land troops to invade a continent. . .

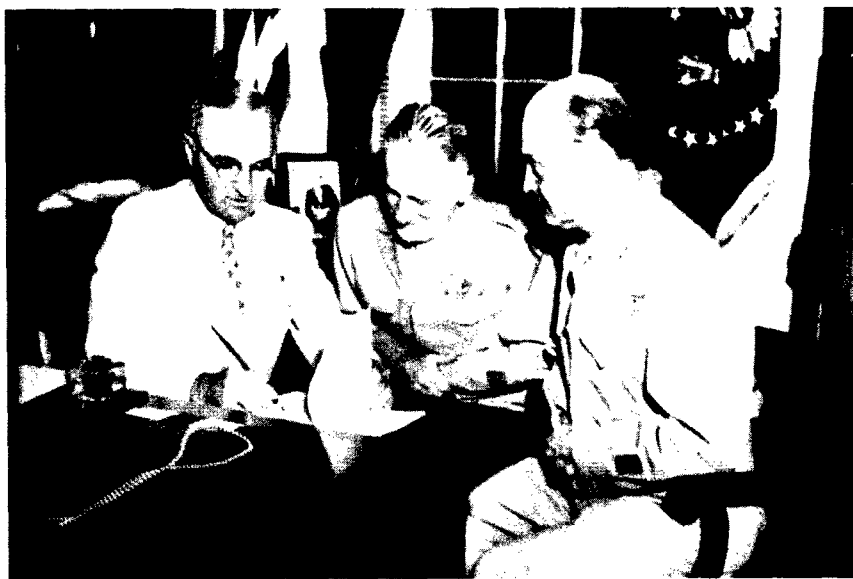
without that Air Force, without its independent power, entirely aside from its ability to sweep the enemy air forces out of the sky, without power to intervene in the ground battle, that invasion would have been fantastic. . . . Unless we had faith in air power as a fighting arm to intervene and make safe that landing, it would have been more than fantastic, it would have been criminal.

Common sense, Eisenhower stressed, dictated that the postwar national security organization feature a single Department of National Defense and a separate Air Force. "I cannot perceive," he told the Congress, "any logic behind the objections which are voiced against this proposal." In the modern world, success rested on an integrated, unified air-ground-sea team: "At one time I was an infantryman, but I have long since forgotten that fact under the responsibility of commanding combined arms."

General Eisenhower knew that after the war the massive military force that the United States fielded would be broken up and sent home. The citizen army would be no more. Economy would be the theme for postwar organization. "If we are to afford an adequate security establishment," the American fighting team must be integrated. "Competition is like some of the habits we have—in small



President Truman and Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, two powerful figures who advocated a unified command structure and an independent Air Force.



Demonstrating his commitment to U.S. air power, President Truman signs the proclamation designating August 1, 1946, as Air Force Day. The date marked the 39th Anniversary of military aviation. On hand for the occasion were Gen. Carl A. Spaatz, AAF Commanding General, (center) and Lt. Gen. Ira C. Eaker, Deputy Commander.

amounts they are very, very desirable; carried too far they are ruinous." The armed services must be unified in Washington as well as in the combat theaters, so that their requirements can be considered as a whole rather than piecemeal. Postwar economy would dictate this. And the Air Force must forward its own requirements as an independent, coequal service: "No sane officer of any arm could contest that thinking. The Air Forces have long ago grown up and if anything was needed to show their equal status with all others, we certainly have proved it in Europe, and from all I hear they have certainly proved it in Japan."

As Commander-in-Chief, President Truman had a keen interest in postwar military organization. Convinced that a lack of proper command organization and faulty communications contributed to the Pearl Harbor disaster, Truman after the war came out strongly for unification and establishment of a separate Air Force. "One of the strongest convictions which I brought to the Presidency," Truman emphasized, "was that the antiquated defense setup. . . had to be re-organized quickly as a step toward insuring our future safety and preserving world peace."

Truman was particularly critical of strategic planning during the war, undertaken by the Joint Chiefs via joint committees. On December 19, 1945, he delivered a special message to Congress which underlined the important lesson of World War II—the need for unified direction of the military services. “We came to the conclusion, soon confirmed by experience,” the Chief Executive noted, “that any extended military effort required overall coordinated control in order to get the most out of the three armed forces. Had we not early in the war adopted this principle of a unified command for operations, our efforts, no matter how heroic, might have failed.”

President Truman disagreed with the Navy’s position that the JCS committee system would be satisfactory for the postwar period. He considered the Joint Chiefs a committee, not a unified command system. While the Joint Chiefs made the system work under the pressure of a global war, this would be difficult if not impossible during peacetime: “As national defense appropriations grow tighter, and as conflicting interests make themselves felt in major issues of policy and strategy, unanimous agreements will become more difficult to reach.” Truman determined after much deliberation that it was time to build a unified defense establishment. The nation required an integrated national security organization whereby the military services no longer went their separate ways “in splendid isolation.” To Truman, there was no question about this. He proposed a Department of National Defense headed by a civilian with three “coordinated” branches representing the land, sea, and air forces. An integral part of such a “unified” defense establishment would be a separate Air Force:

Air power has been developed to a point where its responsibilities are equal to those of land and sea power, and its contribution to our strategic planning is as great. In operation, air power receives its separate assignment in the execution of the over-all plan. These facts were finally recognized in this war in the organizational parity which was granted to air power within our principal unified commands.

In Truman’s view, true unification was an evolutionary process, with creation of a Department of National Defense as a first step. “Unification is much more than a matter of organization,” the President emphasized: “It will require new viewpoints, new doctrine, and new habits of thinking throughout the departmental structure.” Truman’s special message was designed to energize the services to start working and cooperating on draft unification legislation.

The Navy vehemently opposed the plan delineated in Truman’s December message. “As the President knows,” Secretary of the Navy

Forrestal said, "I am so opposed to the fundamental concept expressed in the message that I do not believe there is any very helpful observation that I could make." The Navy's leadership remained unreconstructed, fearful that an independent Air Force would make a grab for naval aviation and that the Army might even attempt to take over the Marine Corps. Forrestal favored a gradual approach towards unification, proposing coordination through joint committees as opposed to legislating a single Department of National Defense and a separate Air Force.

Crafting Unification Legislation

Despite the Navy's objections, in January 1946 Senator Elbert D. Thomas, chairman of the Senate Military Affairs Committee, formed a subcommittee to draft unification legislation. Senators Warren R. Austin and Joseph Lister Hill joined Thomas on the subcommittee. Maj. Gen. Lauris Norstad, Assistant Chief of Air Staff, Plans, and Vice Adm. Arthur W. Radford, newly appointed Deputy Chief of Naval Operations (Air), were named as advisors. As the War Department's representative, Norstad met immediately with Eisenhower, Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson, and Assistant Secretary of War for Air Stuart Symington to plot strategy.

Norstad brought impressive credentials to the task. As the Air Staff's chief planner under Arnold, and then Spaatz, he had crafted the AAF's positions on postwar reorganization and unification. "I was intensely interested in this," Norstad later recalled, "and I got an extra office in the Pentagon, and I put up paragraph by paragraph, all of the proposals that had been made on every one of the pertinent subjects, on organizational relationships. . . .this did not require a hell of a lot of staff work. It required a little leg and arm work."

In early 1946, Norstad and Radford sat in on the subcommittee's sessions, and in April the subcommittee reported on a bill (S.2044) to the Military Affairs Committee that combined features of the so-called Eberstadt report (given to Forrestal) and the War Department's Collins plan. The full committee in May 1946 recommended to the Senate that S.2044 be passed. The Common Defense Act of 1946 called for the creation of a Department of Common Defense, coequal military services, and a Chief of Staff of Common Defense serving as military advisor to the President.

Though the Navy's leadership remained opposed to the legislation, President Truman, becoming impatient, wanted action. He decided against establishing a Chief of Staff to the President and made clear to the Secretary of War and Secretary of the Navy that he expected them to resolve the major issues. On May 31 Patterson and Forrestal

submitted their report to Truman, finding agreement on eight points, but failing to resolve several crucial issues. The eight points of agreement primarily reflected the creation of various agencies in the national security establishment. Patterson and Forrestal, however, could not work out the fundamental questions of a single defense department, creation of a separate Air Force, the future of land-based aviation, and the status of the Marine Corps.

The Navy still opposed a single department, arguing that it needed full control over whatever resources it deemed necessary to fulfill its mission. A civilian Secretary of National Defense might ultimately make decisions prejudicial to the Navy's interests. Eisenhower, Spaatz, and Norstad, on the other hand, held that the nation could not afford duplication. The services should not be self-sufficient, but instead mutually supporting. For example, Spaatz emphasized that using Navy aircraft for long-range reconnaissance, protection of shipping, and antisubmarine operations would duplicate the mission of the AAF's land-based air forces.

Truman welcomed agreement on the eight points, but frustrated by the lack of progress, immediately charged Patterson and Forrestal with crafting legislation for a Department of National Defense headed by a civilian secretary. The President's guidance also stipulated three military departments, each led by a civilian secretary. The Navy would retain important air elements: the Marine Corps would continue to be part of the Navy Department, and the Navy could operate aircraft essential for its operations. The military services, Truman emphasized, "should perform their separate functions under the



Frustrated by the impasse on unification legislation, President Truman spelled out his concept for a Department of National Defense.

unifying direction, authority and control of the Secretary of National Defense. The internal administration of the services should be preserved in order that the high morale and esprit de corps of each service be retained."

The Sherman-Norstad Agreements

At this point, Forrestal asked Vice Admiral Forrest Sherman (Admiral Nimitz's Deputy for Operations) to replace Radford in the unification negotiations. The Joint Chiefs then directed Norstad (now Director of Plans and Operations for the War Department General Staff) and Sherman in July 1946 to write a unification plan. Radford had been considered a "hard liner," even in the Navy. Forrestal and Nimitz, Chief of Naval Operations, believed that Sherman, who did not oppose creation of a separate Air Force, could work more effectively with Norstad. Admiral Radford later noted that Sherman and Norstad "removed the impasse between the services."

Norstad's move to the War Department General Staff, at the specific request of General Eisenhower delivered impressive clout to the AAF. Norstad became only the second airman ever to hold the War Department's key Plans and Operations post, Brig. Gen. Frank Andrews having occupied it a decade earlier. Eisenhower's move showed his personal confidence in Norstad and it marked the War Department's recognition of the air arm's maturity.

In the summer of 1946, Norstad and Sherman first tackled the question of how best to structure unified commands in the overseas theaters. This was an urgent task because during the war in the Pacific the question of unified command had never been resolved. The Army had wanted joint commands comprised of separate land, sea, and air forces, while the Navy preferred command arrangements structured according to geographical areas. For his part, Norstad argued that commands should be set up by functions, rather than geography.

The Joint Chiefs approved Norstad and Sherman's Outline Command Plan and sent it to President Truman on December 12. The document called for a system of unified command in which a single commander would control land, naval, and air forces within a specific geographical area. The first plan of its kind, it reflected the war experience in which unified command had evolved by necessity. The leadership of the Army and Navy agreed that unified command was absolutely vital to successful combined operations. Norstad called it "an idea whose time had come," and with Sherman, defined a Unified Command as a single theater commander responsible to the Joint Chiefs, with a joint staff and three service commanders under him.

Vice Adm. Forrest P. Sherman (*right*) and Maj. Gen. Lauris Norstad (*below*) were chosen to help draft a defense unification plan, which would address the problems of combined operations, among other issues.



Based on the Norstad-Sherman plan, the JCS created several unified commands: Far East Command; Pacific Command; Alaskan Command; Northeast Command; Atlantic Fleet; Caribbean Command; and European Command. In addition, the Joint Chiefs noted that a Strategic Air Command (SAC) had been created in March 1946, comprising strategic air forces not otherwise assigned. In effect, this established SAC as a specified command, although the JCS did not formally recognize it as such until several years later. The commander of the Strategic Air Command, like the unified commanders, would be responsible directly to the Joint Chiefs.

The JCS would exercise strategic direction over the unified commands and assign them missions and tasks. The component commander would deal directly with his own service on issues of administration, supply, training, finance, and construction. For each command operating under JCS missions, either the Army Chief of Staff, the Chief of Naval Operations, or the Commanding General, AAF, would be named executive agent for the Joint Chiefs. On December 14, 1946, President Truman approved the Command Plan.

Next, Norstad and Sherman began working out the details of a draft agreement on functions and organization. Secretary of War Patterson and Secretary of the Navy Forrestal soon informed Truman that they had prepared draft legislation and a proposed executive order describing service functions. The draft national security bill featured a new arrangement for civilian-military control of the armed services. It would create an Office of the Secretary of National Defense, a civilian post, as well as three civilian service Secretaries. The Departments of the Army, Navy (including the Marine Corps and naval aviation), and Air Force would be under the overall direction of the Secretary of National Defense, but they would be administered as separate entities, each with its own military chief. The Joint Chiefs of Staff would comprise the military heads of all three services, subject to the direction of the Secretary of National Defense and supported by a full-time Joint Staff.

Despite this broad agreement, several issues remained unresolved. The Navy, for example, wanted roles and missions written into the unification legislation. The War Department and the AAF disagreed. General Eisenhower emphasized that the unification bill should simply lay out fundamental principles and not get bogged down in an effort to describe the rules by which each service would operate. The War Department Chief feared that the Navy's attempts to specify service functions in the bill would succeed only in arousing resentment.

The National Security Act of 1947

In late February 1947, President Truman sent Congress a draft of the National Security Act of 1947, which was introduced into the Senate as S.758 (H.R. 2319 in the House). The bill called for a National Military Establishment, headed by a Secretary of National Defense and consisting of Departments of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. The Marine Corps would remain part of the Navy Department, and naval aviation would be responsible for naval reconnaissance, antisubmarine warfare, and protection of shipping. This legislation was essentially a compromise: Truman, Eisenhower, Norstad, Spaatz, and Symington succeeded in creating an independent Air Force, but the Navy won its point in creating a relatively weak Secretary of National Defense who would be a coordinator rather than an administrator.

Following Congressional hearings, on June 5, 1947, the Senate Committee on Armed Services approved S.758 with amendments. In July the Senate and House passed the bill by voice vote. A conference committee worked out some differences, and on July 26, 1947, President Truman approved legislation known as the National Security Act of 1947. Among its provisions, the Act established the Office of the Secretary of National Defense and a United States Air Force. On the same day, Truman signed Executive Order 9877, which outlined the functions of the armed forces.

This executive order was identical to the draft order that Patterson and Forrestal had sent to the Chief Executive in January 1947. Truman described it as an assignment of primary functions and responsibilities. The order did resolve much of the Navy's concerns over its air and ground functions. The Navy would retain the Marine Corps and naval aviation, including the missions of naval reconnaissance, antisubmarine warfare, and protection of shipping. The air aspects of these activities would be coordinated with the Air Force, particularly aircraft development and procurement. Air Force personnel, equipment, and facilities would be used "in all cases where economy and effectiveness will thereby be increased." Subject to this proviso, the Navy would have no restrictions in the aircraft maintained and operated for these purposes. In the area of air transport, the Navy would have the aircraft necessary for internal administration and for flying routes of sole interest to the Navy, where requirements could not be met by normal air transport.

Air Force functions encompassed all military aviation, combat and service, not otherwise assigned. Specific USAF functions were: air

operations including joint operations; gaining general air supremacy; establishing local air superiority; responsibility for the strategic air force and strategic air reconnaissance; airlift and support of airborne operations; air support to land and naval forces, including support of occupation forces; and air transport, except for that furnished by the Navy. The order further charged the Air Force with supplying the means to coordinate air defense among the services.

In the National Security Act of 1947 (Public Law 253), Congress declared its intent to provide

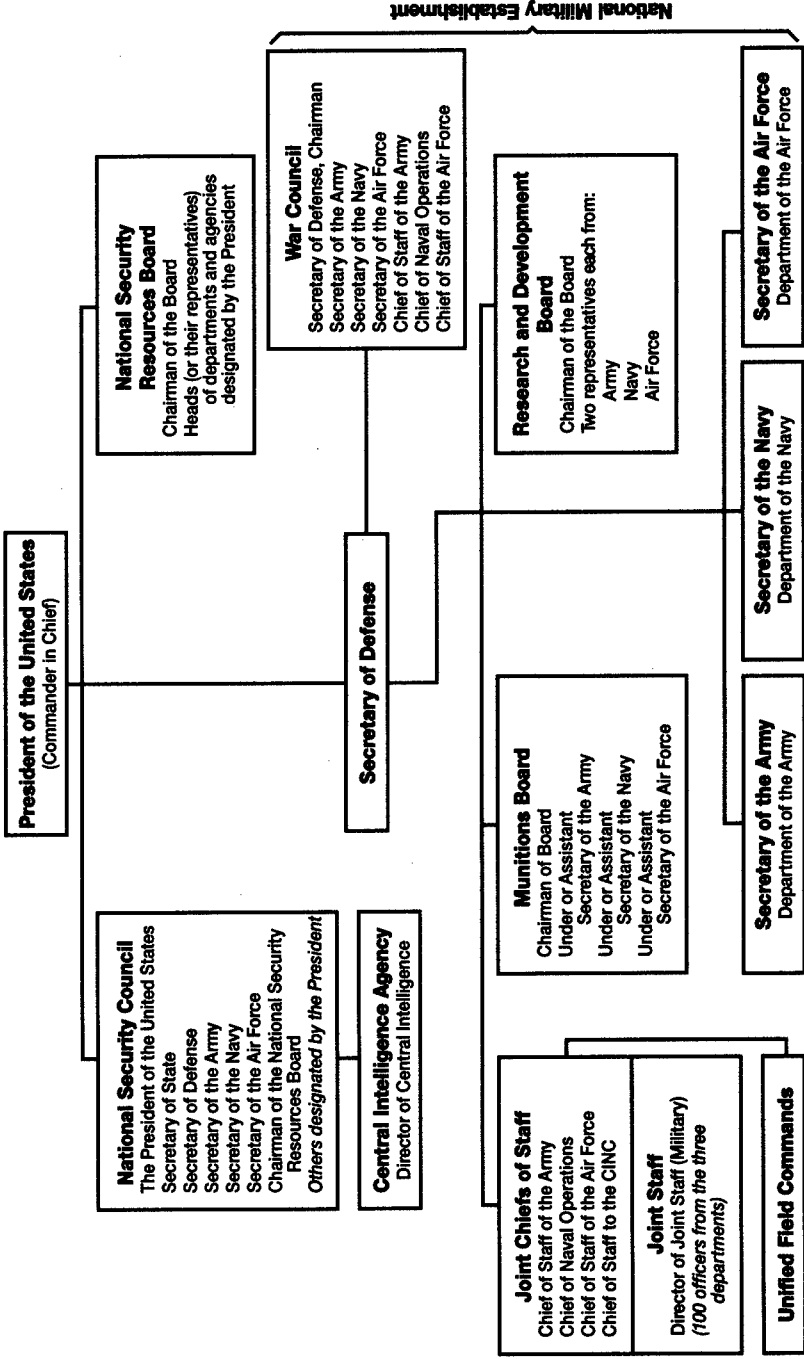
a comprehensive program for the future security of the United States; to provide for the establishment of integrated policies and procedures for the departments, agencies and functions of the Government relating to the national security; to provide three military departments for the operation and administration of the Army, the Navy (including naval aviation and the Marine Corps), and the Air Force, with their assigned combat and service components; to provide for their authoritative coordination and unified direction under civilian control but not to merge them; to provide for the effective strategic direction of the armed forces and for their operation under unified control and for their integration into an efficient team of land, naval and air forces.

The Act created a National Military Establishment, to include the Departments of the Army, Navy, and Air Force (to be administered as individual executive departments) and to provide for coordination and direction by the civilian secretaries of these departments. The law stipulated that the Secretary of Defense would be a civilian appointed by the President as his principal assistant for national security.

A Civilian Secretary of Defense

The powers of the Secretary of Defense were to establish general policies and programs for the military establishment; to exercise general direction and control over the three departments; to abolish duplication in procurement, supply, transportation, storage, health, and research; and to supervise and coordinate the defense budget. These broad powers appeared to deliver on President Truman's desire for firm civilian direction of the armed forces. Nevertheless, an impor-

National Security Organization



tant proviso considerably negated the control and powers of the Secretary of Defense:

nothing herein contained shall prevent the Secretary of the Army, Secretary of the Navy or the Secretary of the Air Force from presenting to the President or to the Director of the Budget, after first so informing the Secretary of Defense, any report or recommendation relating to the Department which he may deem necessary.

Since the law in effect made the President the arbiter of last resort, the final appeal became not only the right but the duty of the incumbent service secretary. Nor could the President, in turn, refuse to hear such an appeal. By permitting appeal, the Act implied the duty of the Chief Executive seriously to entertain it.

The law also restricted the Secretary of Defense's powers by stating that powers and duties not specifically conferred on the Secretary of Defense should be retained by the service secretaries. Without any residual power of his own, the secretary was severely limited in his authority. The secretary's charter to exercise "general direction" placed him in a weak position at the start. The language reflected the Navy's idea of the secretary as a coordinator rather than as an administrator, and it revealed the naval leadership's fear of the secretary as a potential man on horseback.

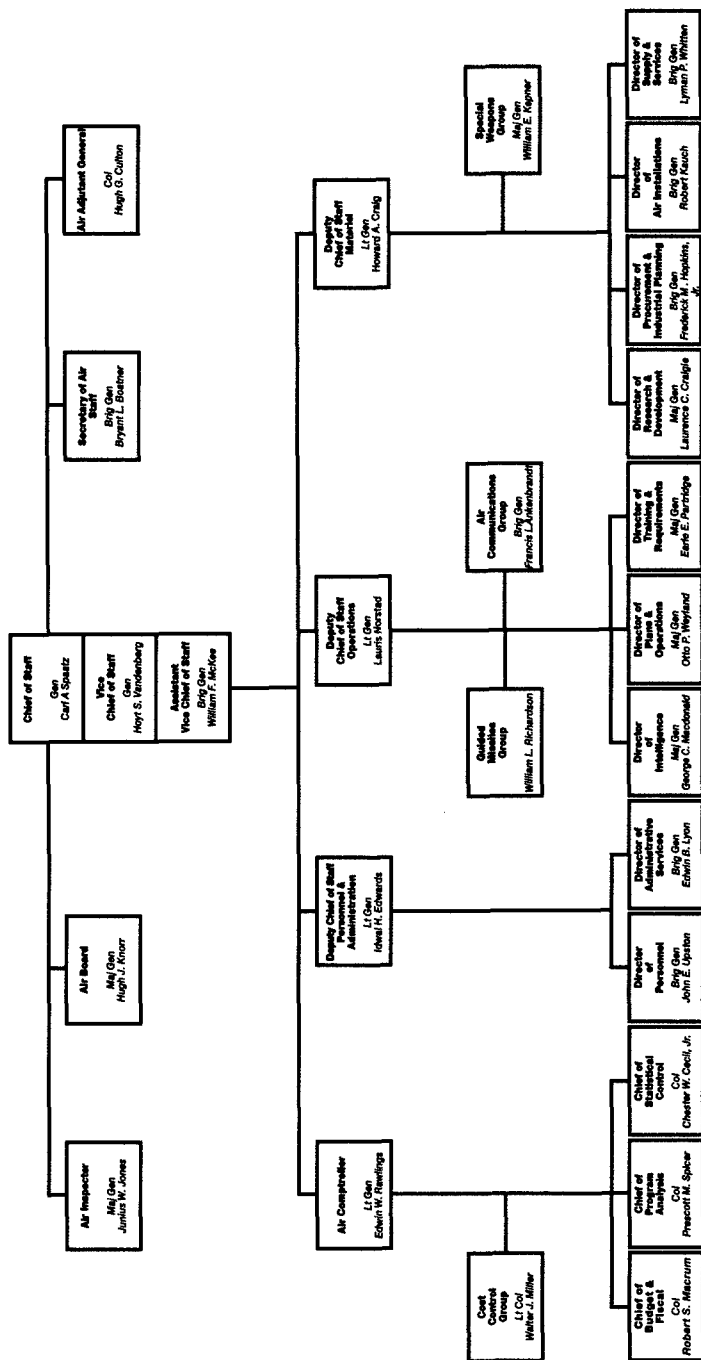
The act specified that the Navy retain the Marine Corps and naval aviation. Naval aviation consisted of combat, service, and training forces, and embraced "land-based naval aviation, air transport essential for naval operations, all air weapons and air techniques involved in the operations and activities of the . . . Navy." Also, the Navy would be "generally" responsible for naval reconnaissance, antisubmarine warfare, and protection of shipping. The National Security Act required the Navy to develop aircraft, weapons, and tactics of naval combat and service forces. Matters of joint concern would be coordinated between the services. Like the Army and Navy, the Marine Corps would be allowed "such aviation as may be organic therein."

The United States Air Force is Born

According to the act, the United States Air Force

shall include aviation forces both combat and service not otherwise assigned. It shall be organized, trained and equipped

10 October 1947



primarily for prompt and sustained offensive and defensive air operations. The Air Force shall be responsible for the preparation of the air forces necessary for the effective prosecution of war except as otherwise assigned and, in accordance with integrated joint mobilization plans, for the expansion of the peacetime components of the Air Force to meet the needs of war.

Hence, the National Security Act used broad terms in setting up the United States Air Force, affording the Air Force considerable latitude in organizing its headquarters and field structure. Like the Army and Navy, the Air Force would be constituted as an executive department. The new Department of the Air Force would be headed by the Secretary of the Air Force, a civilian appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. The Department of the Air Force was further authorized an Under Secretary and two Assistant Secretaries, also civilians appointed by the President with the consent of the Senate. As to USAF personnel and functions, either formerly under the Department of the Army or "deemed by the Secretary of Defense to be necessary or desirable for the operations of the Department of the Air Force or the United States, these shall be transferred to and vested in the Secretary of the Air Force and the Department of the Air Force." The transfer of personnel, property, and installations from the Army to the Air Force would take place over two years, under the direction of the Secretary of Defense.

The United States Air Force was established under the Department of the Air Force. The Chief of Staff, USAF, would be appointed by the President for a four-year term. All officers, warrant officers, and enlisted men of the Air Corps or Army Air Forces would be transferred to the United States Air Force. Others serving in the Army components, but under the authority or command of the Commanding General, AAF, would also be transferred.

The New Joint Chiefs of Staff

Under the Act, the principal responsibilities of the Joint Chiefs of Staff were to prepare strategic plans and give strategic direction to military forces; to prepare joint logistics plans and to assign to the services logistic tasks in accord with such plans and when in the interest of national security, to set up unified commands in strategic areas. The Joint Chiefs would also act as the key military advisers to the President and the Secretary of Defense.

Aside from the military departments and the JCS, the Act created several key organizations. A War Council, consisting of the Secretary of Defense (chairman), the service secretaries, and the military heads of services, was formed to advise the Secretary of Defense on broad policy matters. A new National Security Council (NSC) would advise the President on national security, with the support of a Central Intelligence Agency. Also organized were a Munitions Board, a Research and Development Board, and a National Security Resources Board (NSRB) to advise the President on coordination of military, industrial, and civilian mobilization. National Security Council members included the President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, and the Chairman, National Security Resources Board. The NSC had the duty, under the President, to ensure that the United States had a military establishment strong enough to support the country's foreign policy. Thus, the NSC advised the President on the integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies. Reporting to the NSC the CIA coordinated all intelligence activities and evaluated the intelligence collected.

A Workable Compromise

Though the National Security Act of 1947 gave the Army Air Forces independence, it was not exactly what any of the services originally wanted. Lt. Gen. Ira C. Eaker said the act really "legitimized four military air forces." However, the architects of Public Law 253 had to maneuver within the realm of the possible—which meant compromise. In February 1947, Symington (to become Secretary of the Air Force in September) had written James E. Webb, Director of the Bureau of the Budget, that a better bill could have been drawn, but "a bill which we considered better could not have gotten everybody's approval; and therefore would not have given the President the opportunity to show agreement to the Congress and the people. I don't say this is a good book, but I do say it is a good chapter." The legislation was a starting point, a first step toward a truly integrated military establishment. Its passage had taken a long time, a great deal of effort, and much give-and-take by all concerned. Symington differed with those critics who believed that the Navy had succeeded in structuring the unification bill expressly to suit its own purposes. Nor did he share the resentment of those who felt that Norstad had capitulated to the Navy's demands in structuring the post of Secretary of Defense as a coordinator. The first Secretary of the Air

Force argued that under the circumstances Norstad had done an outstanding job. It had not been easy. Of all the Air Force participants, Symington said, "Norstad should get the most credit for unification. In the days when it looked grim, he stuck to it."

In their deliberations on functions and organization, Norstad and Sherman had faced some hard realities. They realized that President Truman had laid out the major tenets of unification organization, namely a single department of national defense and three coequal services, including a separate Air Force. The Navy lost on the issue of Air Force independence, but won its point of the individual services maintaining their "integrity" and thereby their flexibility of action and administration. Under the National Security Act, the Secretary of Defense would be a coordinator as the Navy wanted, not a strong administrator as desired by the Army and the Air Force.

As the War Department representative negotiating with the Navy, General Norstad found himself in the middle of sensitive and emotional issues. He and Sherman could not completely satisfy both the War Department and the Navy. Unfortunately, Norstad's especially good relations with Sherman did not extend to the rest of the naval hierarchy. In general the Navy fought the unification legislation right up to the enactment of the final bill.

Not surprisingly, Norstad came under fire within the War Department for his unification role. Sometimes he had to reject what he considered to be selfish interests within the War Department. Norstad recalled that just prior to passage of unification legislation, General Devers, the Army Ground Forces commander, told him that the Army thought he was deliberately compromising its best interests. There was some similar feeling within the Army Air Forces itself. The antipathy did not disappear after enactment of the legislation, so disheartened, Norstad asked Spaatz for a transfer out of Washington. Specifically, Norstad suggested that he leave Washington, preferably with a reduction of one grade; or if he were kept on the Air Staff, that he not be promoted in grade or position. Spaatz and Symington turned down Norstad's recommendations.

While the National Security Act was a major achievement, it was also an obvious compromise in which the services yielded on matters of principle to achieve a common goal. Neither the Army, the Army Air Forces, nor the Navy was entirely satisfied with the legislation. The outcome left unresolved some basic points of disagreement between the services—roles and missions and the absence of requisite authority in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. After the unification bill cleared Congress, Admiral Leahy wrote in July 1947: "If the



James Forrestal, the nation's first Secretary of Defense, in his office at the Pentagon, September 1947.

history of the British Royal Air Force is valid evidence, the removal of our Air Arm from control by the Army will result in a definite reduction in the efficiency of our national defense establishment." Still, the 1947 act was probably the best legislation that could have been secured at that time. It was clear to Spaatz, Symington, and Eisenhower, among others, that in the future the defense establishment would continue to evolve toward unification.

President Truman's first choice as Secretary of Defense was Robert P. Patterson, the Secretary of War, a man highly respected in the defense community and in the government. Patterson declined, explaining that his financial condition dictated that he leave the government. The President then named Forrestal to the position, even though the Secretary of the Navy had fought determinedly against unification and a separate Air Force. In certain important respects, however, Forrestal was a logical selection. He had headed the Navy Department, and as Secretary of Defense he might be expected not only to get along with the naval leaders—men he knew and had worked with—but to enlist them as supporters of unification. Having championed legislation featuring coordination as opposed to administration, Forrestal now had the chance to head a National Defense Establishment in the major role of coordinator. The New York Times

commented that Forrestal was the logical choice and "the happiest one that could be made." Forrestal's selection:

is the best guarantee that could be given that unification of the services will be carried out intelligently and efficiently.... Selection of any other man than the former Secretary of the Navy would have sent unification on its way with a handicap. It has been painfully evident that all through the long hearings and debate in Congress that there are many in the Navy who still distrust the whole idea. With Mr. Forrestal as the Secretary, the Navy opponents of unification will know that there is at the top a man who has an intimate knowledge of their branch of the service and one to who it will not be necessary to spell out in detail their side of the case when difficulties arise.

As Forrestal and the naval leaders desired, the services had managed not only to preserve their integrity, but to hold in effect a veto power over the Secretary of Defense. On the issue of defense itself,



Hon. W. Stuart Symington, Secretary of the Air Force, and Gen. Carl A. Spaatz, Air Force Chief of Staff, announcing the new organizational set-up for the Department of the Air Force, October 1, 1947.

Forrestal had warned of the perils of instant demobilization. He believed deeply in a strong national defense.

After appointing Forrestal, Truman named Symington to be Secretary of the Air Force; John L. Sullivan, Secretary of the Navy; and Kenneth C. Royall, Secretary of the Army. Having been Assistant Secretary of War for Air since January 1946, Symington brought top-flight management credentials to his new post. He had also shown uncommon ability to work effectively with Congress and had nurtured an excellent working relationship with General Spaatz. The Symington-Spaatz combination held the promise of unusually fine leadership for the new independent Air Force.

Fifty Years of Air Force Independence

The long struggle for a United States Air Force suggests a certain historical evolution, from the beginning of flight after the turn of the century; the instructive experience of World War I; the advancement of military aviation in the years between the World Wars; and finally, the culminating event of World War II, marked by a spectrum of successful air operations—tactical, strategic and support.

The experience of the Second World War convinced not only air leaders, but President Truman and such military giants as Eisenhower and Marshall, that the nation's security demanded an independent Air Force to take its rightful place alongside the Army and Navy. Prior to the war, the leadership of the War Department had taken various halting steps in this direction. The War Department did not unthinkingly oppose separation, but basically it failed to foresee the impact of military aviation upon future conflict. "The treatment of the Army Air Corps prior to World War II by Army decision makers," observed General Jacob E. Smart, who held key staff positions in the postwar Army Air Forces, "stemmed from their perceptions of how the next war would be fought and their limited understanding of the potential capabilities of air power. Those conscientious men were the products of their respective experiences, education, and imagination. Thus, they were unable to foresee air warfare becoming significant other than as a supporter of ground warfare and were skeptical of the airmen's assertions about potential air capabilities."

At the war's end, Generals Marshall and Eisenhower held no such doubts about the future impact and importance of air forces. They provided the Army experience and a healthy dose of statesmanship to the postwar campaign for a separate Air Force. The third major figure and leader of the drive for postwar independence, General Arnold



Generals Carl A. "Tooey" Spaatz (*left*) and Henry H. "Hap" Arnold, architects of the postwar Air Force.

was an advocate and visionary who began his aviation lessons in the era of the Wright brothers. Eisenhower and Arnold shared a firm belief, based on their wartime experience, that the United States needed to build an integrated national security structure based on unity of command in Washington and in the theaters of operations. The creation of a United States Air Force was fundamental to this concept of unified command. Honored as the founder of the Air Force, Arnold was really much more than that. He had a vision of air power that allowed him to chart the Air Force's future role and structure and its research and development efforts long after the war.

The dawn of the atomic age and the complexity of modern air operations and air-ground integration required an Air Force led by airmen who understood how to build an efficient and effective force, one that could be melded to the other services in a unified defense structure. Secretary of the Air Force Symington proved correct; the National Security Act of 1947 amounted to a first step. As President Truman foresaw, making the National Defense Establishment work effectively would require new ways of thinking. By 1948-1949, it was clear that the 1947 legislation was too weak to allow the Secretary of National Defense to operate his department properly. Forrestal had become a victim of his own concept of the Secretary of National Defense as coordinator rather than administrator. In 1949 several amendments to the National Security Act gave the Secretary more authority, personnel and power and downgraded the services from executive to military departments. The service secretaries would no longer attend meetings of the National Security Council, but would advise the Secretary of Defense.

Passage of the 1949 amendments occurred almost simultaneously with the so-called "Revolt of the Admirals," in which high-ranking naval officers protested against Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson's cancellation of construction of the aircraft carrier *United States*. An official in the office of the Under Secretary of the Navy disseminated an anonymous document charging the Air Force with fraud in procuring the B-36 bomber, Congressional hearings were called, and the Navy and Air Force presented their positions to the Congress on strategy and weapons. The House Committee on Armed Services gave the Air Force a strong vote of confidence on the B-36; the Navy official who leaked the anonymous document was dismissed; a Secretary of the Navy resigned following cancellation of the carrier; and a Chief of Naval Operations was forced to resign.

In the five decades since the creation of the Department of Defense and the separate United States Air Force, controversies over roles and

missions have continued to divide the services, especially when they competed for shrinking defense funds. Yet the national security chain of command and the unique role of the Air Force have remained intact. In the 1990s it would be difficult to imagine a "Revolt of the Admirals." Throughout Korea, Vietnam and now in the post-Cold War era of joint operations and interdependence, the revolution in defense organization that occurred fifty years ago has continued to serve the nation well.

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